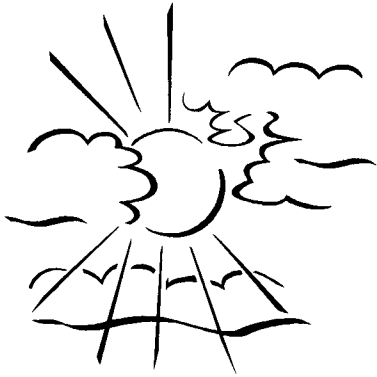


***Department  
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Human  
Services***

Prepared by the  
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Communications  
(517) 373-7394



# **Articles in Today's Clips**

## **Monday, February 27, 2006**

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

TOPIC	PAGE
*Child Abuse/ Neglect/Protection	2-13
Background Checks	14-17
*Juvenile Justice	18-23
Health Care	24-31
Heating Assistance	32-33
Food Assistance	34
Housing	35
Tax Assistance	36-37
Early Childhood Development	38-39

\*Important story at this spot

# Both sets of parents fail dead 7-year-old boy

2/25/2006, 8:45 a.m. ET

By DAVID EGGERT  
The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Ricky Holland had two sets of parents in his short life.

One failed him. The other is charged with killing him.

When the 7-year-old's decomposed body was recovered from a roadside ditch in rural Ingham County in late January, nearly seven months after he went missing, the awful truth began to emerge:

Ricky never had a chance.

His adoptive parents — the ones chosen to give him a better life, who publicly held out hope for his return — now accuse each other of killing him.

Tim, 36, and Lisa Holland, 34, intentionally and continually humiliated Ricky, according to detectives. He was brought to school on a leash, put in diapers when he was too old to wear them and given carrot sandwiches for lunch even though he hated carrots.

Ricky had unexplained bruises and marks consistent with abuse. Yet despite reports of abuse to state officials, the Hollands retained custody of Ricky and four younger children.

A preliminary autopsy shows that Ricky's elbow, shoulder blade, nose and upper jaw were broken at or near the time of his death. Tim Holland told detectives that his wife struck Ricky twice in the head with a hammer, but Lisa Holland said her husband killed him.

"We're very frustrated at how cruel (the Hollands) could be," said Laura Maynard, 62, a Williamston resident who spent eight days searching for Ricky after he vanished from his Williamston home 15 miles east of Lansing last Fourth of July weekend.

The disappearance was highlighted on the TV show "America's Most Wanted." Volunteers, dive teams and K-9 units scoured roads, woods, fields, lakes and rivers around the Holland house for 10 days in ever-widening circles. Through it all, Ricky's adoptive parents told searchers and the media that he'd run away.

Abuse may have marred Ricky's years with the Hollands, who became his foster parents in 2000 and adopted him in 2003. But neglect marked his time with his birth parents, whose rights were terminated by a Jackson County judge in 2002, according to court documents reviewed by The Associated Press.

When Ricky was 3, his biological mother, Casey Gann, told the state Family Independence Agency (now the Department of Human Services) she was homeless, jobless and wanted Ricky put into foster care. She was 16 when Ricky was born in California.

The 40-year-old father, Ricky Gann, was imprisoned there for smuggling 40 pounds of marijuana across the Mexican border. After he was released, he eventually came to Michigan, where he lived out of his car.

The Ganns, who are divorced, each argued for custody of Ricky when the state wanted to end their parental rights. But Jackson County Circuit Judge Chad Schmucker agreed with a state foster care worker and Ricky's court-appointed attorney that the boy's best interests would not be served by living with either biological parent.

The judge said it was unfair for Ricky to languish indefinitely in foster care, not knowing if his birth parents would ever be there for him.

"I think (termination) is the only way to give Ricky an opportunity to have a real future ... to have a normal childhood, to do well in school, to thrive," Schmucker said. "I think Ricky needs this."

According to testimony at the termination hearing, Casey Gann had moved at least nine times in the previous 16 months, did not stay in any job more than a month and failed to complete counseling. She stayed in a homeless shelter and place for victims of domestic assault. She attended supervised visits with Ricky but missed several weeks without notifying the caseworker of her whereabouts.

Theresa Bronsberg, a foster care worker, testified that the missed visits were tough because Ricky enjoyed seeing his mother. The Hollands, Ricky's foster parents at the time, also told Bronsberg he was unhappy when his mother missed a visit.

"He would demonstrate negative behavior, such as defiance, acting out in school to the extent that he would have to be removed from the school setting," Bronsberg said in court.

But Ricky Gann argued his son would suffer more harm by not reuniting with him.

"I feel the reason why he was aggressive after the visits was because he didn't get to leave with me and he had to go back to where he was staying," Ricky Gann said. "I don't believe he's happy where he's at. He wouldn't discuss it with me."

Four years later, Ricky's skeletal remains lie in a forensics lab. He will not be buried until a medical examiner determines the cause of death.

While much remains unknown about Ricky's life with the Hollands, some disturbing stories have surfaced.

For one, he was hungry.

Investigators uncovered evidence of "food deprivation," court documents show. When a startled neighbor found Ricky in her kitchen uninvited searching her refrigerator last June, she gave him peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches and juice. Ricky ate the food and he asked if he could stay with her.

A court-appointed attorney for Tim Holland in child protective proceedings involving his other children said a doctor concluded they were too thin.

"Whenever they went to anybody's house, they ate like horses because they weren't eating," Sam Reedy said.

The Hollands moved from Jackson to Williamston last April. Neighbors say they never saw Ricky and his siblings playing outside but added the parents seemed nice enough. Tim worked as a civilian contractor for the military. When they left Jackson, they left a baby walker on their lawn for anyone to pick up.

"I just thought that was wonderful of them," said Pam Merrill, 41, who has lived in the Jackson neighborhood for 37 years. "Then to find out they do something like that. You just would never have thought. Never."

Jackson school personnel, however, suspected Ricky was being abused and reported it to state caseworkers at Child Protective Services, according to law enforcement. Teachers, nurses and bus drivers are expected to testify at the Hollands' preliminary exam, which is scheduled to start Tuesday. Gov. Jennifer Granholm and other state officials have pledged to thoroughly investigate why Ricky was left with his adoptive family despite reports of abuse. The Department of Human Services has said little about the adoption or the Hollands' dealings with caseworkers, citing confidentiality rules.

For now, though, many people just hope Ricky gets a proper burial when the final autopsy is complete.

"When I think of Ricky, I think of kids," said Neil Rockind, a former attorney for the Hollands. "It makes me very sad there was a young boy that could have been killed by the people he loved. That is a very sad and scary thing."

# Other children of accused parents face uncertain future

2/25/2006, 8:47 a.m. ET

By DAVID EGGERT  
The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Their older brother is dead, and their parents are blaming each other for his murder.

For the four remaining children of Tim and Lisa Holland, the future is uncertain.

Three who share the same biological mother as Ricky Holland, the 7-year-old the Hollands are accused of killing, have gone through the state's child protection system before.

Ricky's birth parents, Ricky and Casey Gann, lost their parental rights after they proved consistently unable to provide a home for him because of homelessness and joblessness.

Ricky first went to live with Tim and Lisa Holland as a foster child in 2000, then was adopted by the childless couple three years later. The Hollands also adopted three other children Ricky's mother later had with another man.

The Hollands' biological daughter, Allison, was born nearly two years ago.

An Ingham County judge has placed the children — Joseph, 4, Kathryn, 3, Sam, 2, and Allison, 20 months — with Tim Holland's sisters for now. Lisa Holland's family is allowed supervised visits.

Tim and Lisa Holland are in jail on open murder charges and can't see their children.

Tim Holland's court-appointed attorney said the children are getting good care from his client's family.

"The kids are thriving where they are now," Sam Reedy said.

Detectives say their seven-month probe into Ricky's disappearance revealed he'd suffered mental and physical abuse during his time with the Hollands. State child protection workers now suspect some of the other children were abused as well.

After a caseworker found Ricky's half-brother Joseph with bruises and scratches, Joseph told the caseworker that "mommy" hit him with a spatula. A caseworker also recently noted a black eye and bruises on the Holland's biological daughter, according to court papers.

The state is asking the court to take jurisdiction over the children and eventually may try to end the Hollands' parental rights.

Mike Nichols, one of Lisa Holland's attorneys, said she denies abusing any of her children and insists she's innocent in Ricky's death.

"It's not up to Lisa to prove anything," he said.

# Worst nightmares

QUICK TAKE

## Sex abuse accusation still shadows family

FLUSHING TOWNSHIP

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Sunday, February 26, 2006

By Ron Fonger

rfonger@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6317

FLUSHING TWP. - Three-year-old Joey Vamos runs across his living room floor, jumps onto the couch near his father and curls up to suck his thumb.

Being back home with mom and dad Kristy and Bryon Vamos seems to feel just right to the blond-haired preschooler, whom a Genesee Circuit Court judge returned to his parents just before Christmas.

That was almost four months after his younger sister, Jamie, drowned in the family's swimming pool. Joey was taken from his parents that same night amid suspicions of abuse in the home.

In a township where there hasn't been a homicide since 1997, the death of little Jamie Vamos on a warm Sept. 1 evening devastated a family and created a buzz, fueled by rumors and a social worker's petition that claimed the 18-month-old girl might have been sexually abused before she died.

"We were told point blank that our daughter had been raped and murdered," said Kristy Vamos.

"I think it affected the whole neighborhood," said Marcy Smith, who lives not far down W.

Carpenter Road from the Vamoses. "It was really emotional for everybody. It was like it didn't even happen because it was so unbelievable."

It's not over yet.

Although county Prosecutor David Leyton decided last week not to file criminal charges in the abuse case township police brought to him, Sheriff Robert J. Pickell said his department - which helped the township in the investigation - remains willing to listen to anyone with information about the case.

"We have a baby we believe was abused," Pickell said last week. "If new evidence surfaces, we'll continue to investigate. ... We can't just walk away from it."

Jamie's father was apparently the last person to see her alive.

She and Joey were with him

outdoors when he said he went into the front yard to get a ball for the three to play with just after 7 p.m.

When he came back, he couldn't find his daughter. In a frantic search, he looked under the solar cover of the above-ground pool before moving on to other danger spots like a nearby pond.

Only when the Vamoses and another couple who had just arrived searched the pool a second time did they find Jamie. About 20 minutes had passed. She wasn't breathing.

At about 7:30, county records show, paramedics were sent to the home after a 911 call.

Neither Bryon Vamos nor paramedics could restart Jamie's heart.

By 7:50, Jamie arrived at Hurley Medical Center by ambulance, and later that night, a doctor told Bryon and Kristy Vamos that Jamie's body showed signs of sexual abuse.

The family contends the hospital jumped to false conclusions and documented some injuries that never existed.

Authorities immediately took Joey away from his parents, placing him with Kristy Vamos' parents.

Bryon Vamos, 37, an auto service technician at a car dealership, and wife Kristy, 35, a stay-at-home mom, say they're victims of a rush to judgment that started soon after they found their daughter in the pool they've since torn down.

They say the sheriff and Hurley botched the investigation with inconsistency and errors.

But doctors at Hurley and investigators with the Sheriff's Department said they saw signs of abuse when they examined Jamie, including an unexplained 1/8-inch vaginal cut.

Before any autopsy and just hours after their daughter died, a police investigator questioned both parents separately, grilling them about what Hurley doctors described as severe rectal and vaginal bruising and lacerations.

Police sent Bryon Vamos home that night in an orange prisoner's jumpsuit, taking his clothes for DNA testing that ended up finding nothing suspicious.

The couple were allowed limited visitation with their son - at first just an hour a week under supervision of the Genesee County Department of Human Services.

They celebrated Joey's Oct. 21 birthday in a cubicle in a state office building.

As visitation with Joey was expanded just before Thanksgiving, allowing for longer visits and supervision by Kristy's parents, the tide began to turn.

On Dec. 16, Oakland County Medical Examiner Ljubisa Dragovic concluded in Jamie's case there was "no physical evidence found to substantiate the allegation of sexual abuse of this child."

Dragovic's office noted the vaginal cut in its report, but didn't conclude abuse was the cause.

Four days later, Joey was returned home, without objections from the county prosecutor's office, DHS or an attorney appointed to represent Joey. The different medical opinions troubled Circuit Judge John A. Gadola, but he said earlier this month that police, social workers and doctors all did their part to be sure Joey is safe at home.

There remains one loose end for the Vamoses, though.

"All we had wanted was an apology," said Kristy Vamos, "but we have never received (it)."

An apology seems unlikely, with Pickell saying he's keeping the case cracked open and wants Bryon Vamos to take a lie-detector test.

Bryon Vamos said he agreed to take a lie-detector test, but not one administered by the sheriff.

"It will be a cold day in hell before I submit myself to more abuse from that department," he said.

Around the township, bits of the Vamos story have spread by word of mouth, and many feel for the family that lost one child forever, then another for months - all in the same 24 hours.

"To lose a child is bad enough, but then to be accused of all those horrible things. ... I can't imagine," said Flushing resident Carol Coe. "Our hearts just go out to them."

Coe and her husband, Bob, lost their 29-year-old daughter, Karen Turk, five years ago in a car crash.

"For us, for months, it felt like we were looking at the world through a gray cloud. The pain is just too deep," Carol Coe said. "(The Vamoses) probably haven't even had a chance to grieve their child."

Bryon Vamos implied as much in notes he prepared before an interview last week with The Flint Journal.

"At the most important time for a family to be together," he wrote, "our son (was) wrongfully taken from us."

Flushing Township Police Chief Douglas Kennedy said he is sympathetic.

"Obviously, we felt for the family. We were very concerned about what they were going through," he said. "We do have a job to do, but certainly, we tried to place ourselves in their shoes as we conducted the investigation."

Kennedy said every entity involved completed a separate probe - from caseworkers to the crime lab. That's why it took so long before the Vamoses regained custody of their son, he said.

"The last thing you want to do is investigate something real quickly and overlook something," Kennedy said.

Hurley spokesman Larry Daly said the hospital was only playing its part in the investigation when doctors notified the Department of Human Services.

Daly said a hospital patient advocate may still talk to the Vamoses to be sure they understand what doctors saw and why they documented it.

The family says that won't undo suspicions in the community.

"Let's just say you find out who your real friends are at a time like this," said Kristy Vamos.

"We got looks when we shopped ... someone gave me the finger when I got the mail," she said.

"It makes you feel like everybody is looking at you.

"I even started taking cash out of the ATM and shopping in New Lothrop" to avoid seeing people in Flushing. "We have spent a fortune trying to prove our innocence."

Joey is still recovering from being away from home, his parents said.

He clings, wants his parents with him when he leaves home and is back in diapers after having been potty trained.

Longtime family friend Karen Fras said others don't know the real Bryon and Kristy - only the accusations.

"They are good, loving parents," she said. "When you know somebody as long as we've known Bryon and Kristy and hear what happened to them, it's like hearing a horror story. As if this family wasn't going through enough."





Evening News photo by VALERIE TOBIAS

Temperance resident Nicole Baehr, 26, still bears the physical scars of her childhood abuse. She has been able to establish a normal, successful life with the help of her adoptive parents, Vince and Lynda Castiglione of Monroe. "I had patches of hair missing ... and they loved me anyway," Mrs. Baehr said.

# A victim of abuse, a story of success

Local woman says adoptive parents saved her, advocates taking in older children

The physical scars are still there.

Her chest tells the horrific story of having boiling water thrown on her. The



A 1984 photo of the young Nicole, taken shortly after she was removed from the home of her birth mother.

small, circular imprint on her cheek was the result of a lit cigarette on her face. And the bump on her skull is the reminder of being struck.

As a child in Indiana, Nicole Baehr suffered as no one should. As in Monroe she was cared for and loved like everyone should.

The first five years of her life were a nightmare; the last 21 have been

"I'm okay," she said, smiling. "I exist. I'm normal. I'm happy."

Nicole Baehr is a success story. But that success would not have been possible if not for Lynda and Vince Castiglione, who hoped to adopt a baby, but instead chose an older child. Years ago the Monroe couple had begun their family when their son, Vincent, was born. Not able to conceive again, the two turned to adoption for their second child.

It could be said that Nicole was born again at age 5, the moment the little girl with the beaten body crawled onto Mrs. Castiglione's lap.

"It was just a natural," Mrs. Castiglione said. "She belonged to us."

"It was meant to happen," added Mr. Castiglione.

Nicole escaped her hell in Indiana, where she spent her early years locked in a closet for weeks at a time. The beatings were regular and vicious. Once, her arms were pulled out of the sockets and just hung there. She had been starved.

One day her biological mother spotted a rat. She killed it, threw it in a fry pan and tried to serve it tail and all to Nicole.

The biological mother, now dead, was a drug addict. Nicole never saw her biological father, who was in prison and, for all



Evening News photo by VALERIE TOBIAS

Nicole and her husband of almost three years, Rodney Baehr, goof around with Zack, one of their two cats, after a dinner with friends at their Temperance home on a recent night. The couple have made renovations to the cozy home, where they plan to start a family soon.

she knows, still is there. Her stepfather sexually abused her.

#### NEW PARENTS, NEW LIFE

As a child, she didn't know another way of life existed. As terrible as it was, that's the only way she saw it - until the Castigliones entered her life.

See **SUCCESS**, Page 2E



Nicole with her parents, Vince and Lynda Castiglione, at her wedding.

#### HELP AVAILABLE FOR ABUSE VICTIMS

Dr. Ralph Hutchison, a Monroe County clinical psychologist, said success stories like Nicole Baehr's are few and far between.

"I always hear the exceptions," he said. "Prisons are full of people who were severely abused and haven't recovered."

Dr. Hutchison is a staff member of Caring Alternatives, a counseling center in Monroe and Bedford Township. He said

those who abuse children most likely were victims themselves, which he called an unacceptable excuse.

Although he never met Nicole, Dr. Hutchison has heard of similar stories of severe abuse many times.

He said the crucial element to success is having one or two people in a victim's life who provide love and guidance. For Nicole, it was Lynda and Vince

Castiglione who adopted her and provided a healthy family environment. That was the key, Dr. Hutchison said.

"What changes people are caring relationships," he said. "It's part of our willingness as members of society to become involved and make a difference."

Nicole's ability to overcome her childhood abuse is inspiring, Dr. Hutchison said.

"It's wonderful she is recover-

ing and is a success," he said. "It's real."

Victims of abuse should seek help from agencies that offer counseling, support groups, and other services (24 Charities (240 Community M 7340).

To report child abuse or neglect, call Child Welfare Services at 243-7400.

#### 45 children adopted

In Monroe, children are adopted. Of the 45 older children adopted last year, 10 were adopted by the Monroe County Children's Center.

Terry B. the Monroe County Children's Center said finding children to adopt is a challenge.

"Every baby," he said, "has issues with adoption. It's a paying system."

For some children, adoption is a life-changing experience.

Tom S. home lie with the agency, so looking for parents. care class April 22 at

For information, coming a adopting Schroeder Beurer at

physical scars are still there.



photo of the young Nicole, shortly after she was removed from the home of her birth mother.

Her chest tells the horrific story of having boiling water thrown on her. The small, circular imprint on her cheek was the result of a lit cigarette jammed into her face. And the bump on her skull is the reminder of being struck with a hammer.

As a child in Indiana, Nicole Baehr suffered as no one should. As a growing girl in Monroe she was cared for and loved like everyone should. The first five years of her life were a nightmare; the last 21 have been normal.

Nicole Baehr is a success story. But that success would not have been possible if not for Linda and Vince Castiglione. They hoped to adopt a baby, but instead chose an older child. Years ago the Monroe couple had begun their family when their son, Vincent, was born. Unable to conceive again, they turned to adoption for their second child.

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See **SUCCESS**, Page 2E

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"It's wonderful she is recover-

### 45 children seeking adoption in county

In Monroe County, 45 children are available for adoption. Of those, 12 are 12 and older.

Terry Beurer, director of the Monroe County office of the Michigan Department of Human Services, said finding homes for older children always is challenging.

"Everybody wants a baby," he said. "One of the issues we're facing is paying close attention to children growing out of the system."

For some adults, foster care might be a step toward adoption.

Tom Schroeder, foster home licensing specialist with the human services agency, said he is always looking for licensed foster parents. The next foster care classes available April 22 and 29.

For information on becoming a foster parent adopting a child, call Schroeder at 243-7414 or Beurer at 243-7203.

ing and is a successful adult said. "It's really great to be

Victims of child abuse seek help from a variety of agencies that offer professional counseling, such as Caring Alternatives (242-8711), Cal Charities (240-3850) or Michigan Community Mental Health (7340).

To report child abuse or neglect, call Child Protective Services at 243-7400.

## From Page 1E

### Success (cont.)

When they first saw her through an adoption agency, Nicole was malnourished and had little hair. But the bond was immediate. They took her home.

"God picked me for them," Nicole said. "If it wasn't for them, I wouldn't be here. They saved my life."

Today, Nicole is a charming 26-year-old woman who smiles regularly and laughs easily. Pretty and petite, she has been married to Rodney Baehr for three years and the two live in a home they own in Temperance. She is a beautician for Miracle Salon & Spa in Temperance, likes to cook and enjoys her friends.

Although her abusive past is a lifetime ago and she has been able to put it behind her, Nicole hopes that her success can be shared. She wants others who have suffered to know that counseling and open discussion can help.

"Talking about it, getting my story out there is huge therapy for me," she said. "It's not bottled up. That has helped me to heal."

Above all, she advocates for older-child adoption. Like so many couples willing to adopt, the Castigliones were hoping for a baby brother or sister for their son, now 28. But they happily changed their minds and took in a 5-year-old instead. That decision changed all their lives for the better.

Nicole understands the desire for couples to adopt infants, but, she said, adopting someone older is an act of kindness for that child.

"I thought she was entitled to a childhood," Mrs. Castiglione said. "She needed to learn how to play. She didn't even know what a crayon was."

Nicole assumes she was



— Evening News photos by VALERIE TOBIAS

Nicole Baehr (above right) goofos around with best friend Abby Donbrosky at the Village Pizzeria in Temperance. Now a sought-after stylist at Miracle Spa & Salon in Temperance, Mrs. Baehr works on Lenore Lange of Temperance Wednesday (right photo). "When you adopt an older child, you're doing it for the child. It's completely unselfish," she said.

treated poorly because she was in the way. When her biological mother married her stepfather, they had two boys.

"I was baggage," she said.

After her rescue, Nicole had to learn how to do simple things a child should know. She had to learn to play, to run, to have structure, to enjoy a birthday, to be loved.

She learned quickly and as she grew older, she led a normal life: sports, boys, homework, dances, family. She graduated from Monroe High School in 1998.

### LASTING EFFECTS

It was during her middle school years that the Castigliones discovered her childhood abuse had lasting physical effects.

She suffered a seizure in the middle of the basketball floor due to syncope, an affliction where the blood pressure drops, causing temporary lack of oxygen to the brain. She sometimes passed out eight to 10 times a day.

Mr. Castiglione, who worked a swing shift, remembers sleeping with the telephone next to him just in case he was needed.

Nicole also has been through more than 20 surgical procedures to correct problems, mostly in the joints due to her malnutrition as a child.

She dismisses these as inconveniences of life. Instead, she prefers to be grateful for what she has and looks forward to the day when she can be a mother and raise her own children.

There were concerns about parenthood because of her past, but Mrs. Castiglione is quick to reassure her that she will be an excellent mother.

"She used to be worried," Mrs. Castiglione said. "But I told her the cycle has been broken."

Nicole is frank about her past and for her talking about it helps. She hopes that others who have gone through similar experiences will come forward and talk about it to someone they

Going South for spring training? Check

day, February 26, 2006

The Monroe Sunday

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trust. She also wants them to know that it's not their fault.

"I'm very self-conscious, but I'm not afraid to talk about it and I'm not ashamed," she said. "It can make you feel like it's your fault. It's not."

But those days of fear and second-guessing are long gone. Now the most important people in her life are her husband, family and friends. And it has been that way for years.

Twenty-one years ago this month, the Castigliones saved a little girl's life and, at the same time, gained a daughter who blossomed into a confident, energetic young woman. She needed them and they needed her.

"I can't help but be impressed with how she turned out," Mrs. Castiglione said. "I'm not sure too many people could have survived what she went through. She's just a joy."

Nicole can be reached by e-mail at [nicole03@buckeye-express.com](mailto:nicole03@buckeye-express.com).

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ask the Web first

# State's inaccurate list of school criminals draws criticism

By **DAVID EGGERT**

Feb 26, 8:45 AM EST

Associated Press Writer

LANSING, Mich. (AP) -- Fifth-grade teacher Sandy Joslin is a superintendent's dream.

She's one of just 189 teachers in Michigan to earn a rigorous national certificate. She's also working toward a second master's degree.

So when Joslin's name recently popped up on a statewide list of school workers with criminal histories, she was floored. The list - required under a new law aimed at eliminating sex offenders and other convicted criminals from the classroom - flagged her for drug crimes she had never committed.

"I was so upset I could not go back to the classroom," said Joslin, 45, an eight-year teaching veteran in Howell. "I take my career very, very seriously. Then to have this happen, it's kind of disheartening."

Like other teachers, Joslin was a casualty of a flawed list.

That list has since been recalled. And while state officials scramble to develop a better one and lawmakers work on changes, critics are wondering what happened the first time around.

They say the Republican-controlled Legislature and Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm unanimously rammed through the law in a frenzy, with little thought to ensuring accuracy.

"There just seemed to be an overall lack of respect for the potential innocent people out there," said Margaret Trimer-Hartley, spokeswoman for the Michigan Education Association, a 160,000-member teachers' union.

The law, which took effect Jan. 1, requires the state Department of Education and State Police to check all school employees against a list of people with criminal convictions twice a year until 2008.

In the first go-around in January, the State Police ran a search based on names and Social Security numbers - a less reliable method - and gave matching names to the education department, which shipped them to school districts. Some of the wrongly listed matched people with similar names, while others might have been victims of identity theft.

State officials say they expected districts to cleanse inaccuracies from the list before making it public, but many criticize that approach as putting the onus on workers to prove their innocence.

"It's your responsibility to prove that it's not you," said Joslin, who credited Howell Public Schools for not rushing to judgment in her case.

Some districts fired innocent workers before eventually reinstating them.

For the new list, the State Police will verify flagged names by the end of March. State superintendent Mike Flanagan says the new process will provide the most accurate information possible.

When the media sought access to the first list, teachers' unions said publishing the names of wrongly accused workers would invade their privacy and ruin lives.

"To have something attached to my name that's not true is not right," said Tina VanSickle, a middle school teacher in Morley, near Big Rapids, who was mistakenly tagged for seven misdemeanors and one felony.

A state and federal judge agreed.

U.S. District Judge Paul Gadola ordered the first list to be recalled because he said innocent people likely would sustain a blow to their reputations and possibly lose their jobs. The law requires the immediate firing of sex offenders, and other past felons could keep their jobs only if OK'd by local superintendents and school boards.

Some lawmakers - including Republican House Speaker Craig DeRoche of Novi - initially responded to the flap over the media's request for the list by blaming teachers' unions for filing suit. They said news outlets shouldn't be kept from obtaining names, and they proposed legislation forcing the education department to release them.

But they backtracked after hearing from superintendents and others who said the list had an embarrassing number of errors.

The Senate may vote this week on a House-passed bill that would give school districts more time before releasing the names of workers with criminal records. It would exempt the list from Freedom of Information Act requests for 14 days, a move lawmakers say is necessary to let school officials verify names but still protect children.

Granholm, lawmakers and the Michigan Press Association are supportive of the legislation. It ensures the public can see all criminal convictions - including misdemeanor drunk driving offenses, which some argue could be important to know if school personnel are driving children to extracurricular events.

Some critics, though, worry about outing workers for mistakes possibly made years ago.

"As long as it's not truly a felony, it's not really my business to know," said Sen. Mike Goschka, R-Brant, who argues the goal should be removing sexual predators from schools, not digging up more minor crimes.

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On the Net:

AFT Michigan: <http://aftmichigan.org>

Michigan Education Association: <http://www.mea.org>

Michigan Legislature: <http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

## **We have the right to know**

*Friday, February 24, 2006 1:08 PM EST*

School districts around Northern Michigan and the state are reviewing what to do about "criminals" in their midst.

A new law targeting sex offenders prompted the state to check the criminal histories of more than 200,000 school employees. School districts began receiving names from the state earlier this month. Under the law that took effect Jan. 1, sex offenders on the list will be fired. Those with felony convictions must receive approval from the superintendent and school board to stay employed.

For now most schools aren't doing anything formally. One reason is they're enjoined not to. The "list" is adding up to trouble.

It's got more holes than Swiss cheese.

We're conflicted. As a newspaper it is crystal clear to us that a list, generated by state government for local government, is undeniably a public record subject to release under the state Freedom of Information Act.

Those who argue otherwise - teachers unions and school boards - are wrong. Their response is a reaction to information the list contains. Accuracy concerns aside, it will embarrass some of their members and employees.

Yes, people want to keep their crimes hidden. This is the very reason why government must not decide on its own what is and isn't public record. They'd release nothing. This is not their decision to make.

We think the public - in particular, parents - have the right to know if a felon is in contact with their children. No argument a teachers union can make should override that right to know.

If the school learns it is employing a sex offender and fires the person because of it, does the public have the right to know why that person was fired?

However, does a teacher's misdemeanor drunk driving conviction, or a custodian's 25-year-old shoplifting rap at all matter to a child's safety or education? Does our right to know in these cases outweigh a good employee's right to privacy?

It gets even cloudier when we consider the mistakes the list contains.

East Jordan, for example, has three people who show up on the list. Two were mistaken identities and one was a minor offense.



We can see in these cases why the unions and the schools want to keep this list under wraps. Public release of the information that is wrong would irrevocably harm an innocent person's reputation.

On the other hand, nothing guarantees that any public record is accurate. That excuse could be, and would be, used to keep anything secret.

This list is so troublesome a federal judge has temporarily blocked Michigan from making it public. The state, the Department of Education and the Michigan State Police were ordered to recall all copies of the list previously released to local boards of education or other units of government. The order may also restrict districts from acting upon information on the list.

It seems to us the record is, at best, incomplete. We cannot fault school board for playing this close to the vest as they search for the path which protects their employees and the children.

We support recall of this list. It needs to be more accurate and right now it isn't.

We want the state to take it all back, work with school districts to ensure it is correct and then make it public. Newspapers and the public should not be forced to sue to get this information.

We have the right to know, but we want to know it's right.

Published February 25, 2006

## **Embattled Highfields lays off 71 workers Board hopes to call people back under new plan**

By T.M. Shultz  
Lansing State Journal

ONONDAGA - With no clients in its residential treatment program for youth, Highfields Inc. has laid off 71 employees.

"The hope is that once we complete everything we need to complete, we'll be able to bring them back," Brian Cavanaugh, board member and Lansing attorney, said Friday.

It's unclear how many workers remain at Highfields. The residential program makes up 40 percent to 50 percent of the facility's operations, officials have said.

Ingham County Family Court and the state Department of Human Services removed their youngsters earlier this month after allegations of mistreatment. Some of those allegations were later substantiated, and at least two Highfields counselors were fired.

Highfields counselor Herb Haygood said he's discouraged by the situation and probably won't go back.

"They called everyone in Wednesday," Haygood said.

"We all met in the cafeteria, and they let everyone know that they couldn't pay us. They said that in six to eight weeks they could hire everyone back."

Haygood, a senior at Michigan State University and a former NFL football player, said he intends to stick with his coaching work.

### **Changes ahead**

Highfields has agreed to revamp its residential treatment programs and to show Ingham family court judges its new plans in three weeks.

Meanwhile, the 18 Ingham County boys ages 12 to 17 who were removed Feb. 14 are getting the care they need, said Nery Oliver, the deputy director of the family court's juvenile division.

"These kids are not just out there floundering," Oliver said.

Seventeen are in home detention, and one is at a detention facility in Shiawassee County.

Two court officers who worked in the StART (Stabilization Assessment Reintegration Treatment) program and two home detention officers have been assigned to monitor the 17 youngsters.

In home detention:

- Someone is responsible for the child at all times.
- The boy can't leave the house without a court officer's permission and can't have friends in the home unless it's cleared in advance.
- Court officers make unannounced home visits and phone calls to make certain the child is there.
- Boys who are eligible to be in school are in school, Oliver said, and those who have been expelled from school are encouraged to continue improving their reading and writing skills until they can return.

Services available

Travis Faulds, the court's director of juvenile services, said the court has mobilized a wide variety of services to help the boys, including substance abuse and mental health counseling.

"We want to give them an opportunity to be successful in the community," Faulds said.

It seems to be working, the men agreed.

"We have not had any negative situations arise, but that's not surprising to me," Oliver said. "They are not the chronic, serious delinquent."

All of the boys were in the StART program, Oliver said - an early intervention program meant to last 90 days.

Then the boys would be back in their homes anyway.

It's for boys who aren't yet in serious trouble and who typically have fairly stable family situations.

"This is not a hard-core program," Oliver stressed. "These aren't marauding bands of gang members."

Boys who come before judges now who would have benefitted from being placed in the StART program at Highfields will be placed in the same home detention situation that the 17 boys are in, Oliver said.

T.M. Shultz can be reached at [tshultz@lsj.com](mailto:tshultz@lsj.com) or at 377-1061.

Published February 25, 2006

Saturday's letters to the editor

Lansing State Journal

## Highfields needed

As one who was around when former Probate Judge Robert Drake gave birth to the Highfields Inc. concept and has watched it grow and mature, I have complete confidence that the Highfields board and staff will correct these problems and move forward.

In Michigan, we are indeed blessed to have a range of quality private agencies providing youth services - and Highfields has been among the best.

Starting as a residential care program, Highfields has expanded to now include a variety of services in our community. I trust that the Highfields board and management will treat the recent events as a stumbling block, and emerge stronger than ever.

Now is the time for all of us to lend support, both spiritually and financially, as we would to a neighbor or friend in need. We do need Highfields in our neighborhood.

Vergil M. Pinckney  
Lansing

## Highfields helped

I have worked at Highfields in Onondaga for six years. I saw many young boys arrive who had been neglected, abused, without a home or family; saw their lives turn around, and saw them leave with hope for a future they had never thought possible. Many still feel those staff and peers at Highfields were family and always will be.

This week there were many tears - from staff, teachers and young boys who were told they were being forced to leave the only safe, stable environment they had ever known. Regardless of what the media conveyed, they were loved, cared for, given structure, counseling and taught skills to help them lead productive, fruitful lives.

Where are these kids who were forced to leave? My heart is heavy - so sorry young ones - we think of you every day!

Rebecca R. Gibson  
Springport

## Oversee schooling

I have followed the sad story of Ricky Holland with interest. It reveals deficits in many systems designed to protect children.

One aspect of the case that hasn't received much attention is that Ricky was supposedly "home-schooled."

Home-schooling is a legitimate option for families who want their children's education to reflect their own religious or social beliefs.

But I don't think claiming one's child is home-schooled should signal the end of the state's responsibility to monitor a child's progress and well-being.

Proof that parents are even marginally qualified to home-school and that educational instruction is occurring should be required.

Public and even private schools are beset with many problems, but they do still act as one safety net for children in troubled homes. Parents shouldn't simply be allowed to remove their children from these environments to cover up abuse and neglect, which I suspect was the case with the Holland family.

Annemarie Hodges  
Lansing

Published February 27, 2006

## **Highfields: Change must come at youth home; let's get to talking about it**

A Lansing State Journal editorial

Upon allegations of abuse of children in the public charge, there is a natural revulsion - a desire to sever ties with those who would betray such a sensitive responsibility.

But when it comes to the scandal at Highfields Inc., severing ties is at best a short-term strategy. What Ingham County and the state need is a properly managed, safe Highfields to continue its work with troubled teens.

When abuse reports surfaced at Highfields, Ingham County judges pulled 18 boys they had sent there. Ingham County commissioners halted payments on a \$2 million contract with Highfields, and the state withdrew 15 teens under its supervision.

Highfields has fired two employees, shut down its residential operation (leading to 71 layoffs) and met with judges to discuss their complaints.

These actions are appropriate. No institution in charge of children can operate if there are questions about safety.

But as multiple investigations into mistreatment continue, county and state officials must address the question: If not Highfields, what?

The teens pulled from Highfields didn't disappear. Most of the county teens at Highfields were sent into home detention, a form of supervision clearly not appropriate since judges didn't employ it in the first place. All the state would say is the 15 it pulled from Highfields were in a "safe and appropriate place." The lack of detail offered by the state strongly implies that their solution is temporary, too.

Nor are there plenty of Highfields-type institutions from which public officials may choose. Local youths aren't helped if they have to be sent away to get court-ordered treatment.

Prior to this scandal, Highfields was considered a local success story. The goal right now is to make it a success again: a place that can treat troubled youth with unquestioned safety and professionalism.

Ingham County judges have to be clear with the Highfields board over what policies will restore confidence. It is then up to the Highfields' board to find a way to meet those

expectations. And the Highfields board must not shrink from the lessons offered by its apparent inability to ensure safety.

If it can't, Ingham judges will have to go elsewhere for treatment services - and what has been a huge local asset will have been lost.

# Eight charged in death of nursing-home patient

Monday, February 27, 2006

By Ted Roelofs  
The Grand Rapids Press

Eight people from a Big Rapids nursing home were charged with 18 felony counts for the January 2005 asphyxiation death of a Medicaid patient because her oxygen tank wasn't changed. Attorney General Mike Cox announced the charges today against employees of Metron Nursing Facility, calling it a "tragic death."

Cox's office filed charges against five registered nurses, the nursing home's medical director, the former administrator and a certified nursing assistant at the home in the death of Sarah Comer, 50, of Big Rapids.

The charges include involuntary manslaughter, accessory after the fact as a result of a cover-up and five misdemeanor charges, including failure to report the incident to the Michigan Department of Community Health following the Jan. 16, 2005, death of Comer, a newly admitted Medicaid recipient.

According to a statement from Cox, Comer was transferred for rehabilitation from Spectrum Health Butterworth Campus to Metron in the late afternoon of the day before her death.

Comer was "extremely oxygen-dependent," according to the statement, and had just been weaned from a ventilator to oxygen 48 hours before her transfer.

Patients in need of oxygen normally are placed in a hall where oxygen records are kept, according to the statement. Instead, Comer was placed in a room for Medicaid patients where no such records are kept, it said.

"No special instructions or orders were given to staff," the statement said.

Cox alleged that the oxygen tank was never charged and ran out before 6:45 a.m.

"Early morning reports to nursing staff that the resident was experiencing dizziness were ignored," the statement said.

Comer was found dead at 8:50 a.m.

Medical examiner investigators looked into the incident but were never informed the tank had run out of oxygen, Cox alleged.

"As a result, no autopsy was performed and the death certificate was instead sent to the resident's former physician for signature with the cause of death incorrectly listed as myocardial infarction (heart attack) due to natural causes," Cox stated.

Cox alleged that Metron administration then tried to cover up the death by omitting any reference to the empty tank in a written report to the state.

Cox filed the complaints in district court in Mecosta County against the following individuals:

Kathleen Rose Johnson, 57, of Big Rapids, a nurse, whose charges include involuntary manslaughter, placing false information on a medical chart and tempering with evidence; Cheryl Lynn Williams, 41, currently of Florida, a nurse whose charges include involuntary manslaughter and accessory after the fact to a felony;



Tracey Marie Moore, 31, of Luther, a nursing assistant whose charges include involuntary manslaughter;

Sharon Elaine Mumah, 39, of Morley, interim director of nursing and charged with second-degree abuse of a vulnerable adult, accessory after the fact to a felony and failure to report abuse of a patient;

Christine Marie Mondrella, 42, of Paris, a nurse charged with failure to report abuse of a patient;

Laura Lynn Ferrara, 41, of Kalamazoo, a nurse and corporate clinical director for Metron in Grand Rapids charged with accessory after the fact to a felony;

Rudy Casimer Ochs, 49, of Hart, medical director for Metron of Big Rapids and deputy medical examiner for Mecosta County charged with accessory after the fact to a felony and willful neglect of duty as a public officer;

Robert Koch, Jr., 49, of South Carolina, the nursing home administrator charged with accessory after the fact and two counts of failure to report abuse of a patient.

Detroit News

February 27, 2006

## **Fix Medicare now to avert disaster later**

### **Fundamental change needed to preserve system for treating the elderly**

by U.S. Sen. Bill Frist

With every passing year our nation's health insurance programs for the elderly, disabled, and poor draw closer to a crisis point. Right now, transforming Medicare may help American industry more than anything else that government could do.

The problem is stark. The Medicare program will run out of money sometime around 2020. At that point, the government would almost certainly need to cut benefits for all Medicare beneficiaries while raising taxes on every working American.

System in danger

Without fundamental change, however, even this unpleasant course of action would only provide a temporary fix. The program would continue to expand as the ranks of retirees grow, and eventually, face total collapse. The increased tax burden alone would cripple America's global competitiveness.

While many have focused attention on Social Security, Medicare represents a more pressing problem. As the nation's largest provider of health coverage, the government has the duty to transform Medicare and secure it for the future.

Such a transformation needs to begin with efforts to help Americans deal with chronic diseases. Medicare already spends 75 percent of its budget helping individuals who have diabetes and heart disease. People with other chronic conditions consume almost all of the remaining spending. If we can make progress on the chronic disease front, we'll make progress in all of Medicare.

For a long time, however, we have spent most of our Medicare dollars treating disease symptoms and handling patient crises rather than trying to prevent problems in the first place. The first integrated programs intended to help beneficiaries manage chronic diseases only began in 2003 when the Senate passed the Medicare Modernization Act.

Doing a good job managing any ongoing condition, however, requires high quality information. Right now, our medical system typically can't provide it.

While clinical medical technology gets better every year, our medical information technology systems remain stuck in the 1960s.

With better information technology--including secure electronic medical records for every American who wants them-- we can begin to provide patients and their doctors alike with the tools they need to make informed choices about the best ways to manage chronic conditions. In addition, Congress should empower Americans to take control of their own care. The reason is simple: When patients make informed choices, costs go down.

Despite media accounts to the contrary, the new Medicare prescription drug benefit that Congress approved in 2003 will cost beneficiaries nearly 25 percent less than projected, largely because market forces have driven down its costs.

No quick fix for industry

Nothing we can do for Medicare will provide a quick fix for the auto industry or anyone else. Nor should any private company expect the government to swoop in and assume its health care costs. A transformed Medicare system, however, could render enormous benefits to the entire American economy. It could provide a model for high quality care that keeps costs under control while giving patients the choices they need and deserve. This would help lead the way out of the auto industry's health care woes.

In the end, we can either fix Medicare to make it better for everyone or saddle our entire economy with high taxes while simultaneously cutting back on benefits. Detroit automakers have already found that our existing health care system costs too much. Now, the government has begun to find out the same thing. We need to fix Medicare.

*Sen. Bill Frist, R-Tennessee, is a physician and majority leader of the U.S. Senate. E-mail letters to The Detroit News at [letters@detnews.com](mailto:letters@detnews.com)*

# Expert offers guidance on Medicare plan

Saturday, February 25, 2006

By Brad Flory  
bflory@citpat.com -- 768-4925

For the second time in a month, an expert came to Jackson to fight confusion over Medicare's new prescription drug plan.

"This plan is designed to get drugs into people's houses who otherwise don't have any coverage," Mary Johnson, director of the Michigan Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program, said Friday. "It is not easy to get through. But it's worth it."

Johnson spoke at a town-hall meeting organized by state Rep. Rick Baxter, R-Concord, at the Carnegie branch of the Jackson District Library. About 70 people, most past retirement age, attended. The forum evolved into a two-hour question-and-answer session. Many seniors expressed frustration understanding Medicare's drug plan, called Part D, that began Jan. 1. Highlights stressed by Johnson are:

Medicare prescription coverage is optional. Some seniors do not need it.

Private companies sell insurance approved and subsidized by government. In Michigan, 18 companies offer 41 plans.

Coverage and costs vary. Monthly premiums in Michigan range from \$13.75 to \$65.59.

Comparison shopping is important.

Unless covered by another insurance, anyone who does not sign up by May 15 will pay higher premiums for enrolling later.

On average, Johnson said, Medicare's drug plan will save \$1,100 a year for seniors without drug coverage.

Monday, February 27, 2006

## **Health insurance mandates drive up costs Scrap proposals that demand specific treatments be covered**

The Detroit News

It's mandate season again. This time, lawmakers want health insurance programs to cover prescription contraceptives. But rather than add new demands on employer-provided insurance, the state should be stripping away existing ones.

At first glance, it seems logical that if a health insurance plan covers prescription drugs, contraceptive medications or devices ought to be included.

But here's another logical idea: Shouldn't the people who pay for health insurance get to decide what coverage they buy?

State Sens. Bev Hammerstrom, R-Temperance, and Martha Scott, D-Highland Park, have introduced legislation to impose the health insurance contraception mandate. Most health insurers, recognizing that contraception is less expensive than the costs associated with pregnancy, offer prescription coverage, but some don't.

Other pending bills would require mental health coverage on an equal basis with physical health and coverage of infertility treatments. If passed, they'd trigger still more attempts to micromanage health insurance coverage.

Last year, those on the other side of the birth-control argument tried to get a law adopted that would have made it harder for health insurance to cover abortions.

In the past, optometrists, chiropractors and other practitioners wanted laws requiring health insurance plans to cover their specialties.

Those were all bad ideas, which, fortunately, were defeated.

The trouble with health insurance mandates is that they drive up the cost of health insurance plans. They create an incentive for smaller firms to offer no coverage at all. They also deprive workers and their employers of the chance to work out for themselves the treatments they most want covered.

And the mandates abuse the purpose of state regulation of insurance. The idea of such regulation is that the state must protect people by making sure insurance providers have adequate funds to cover claims. When coverage requirements are imposed, politicians are abusing this regulatory authority to score political points.

The Economic Alliance of Michigan, which is a coalition of larger employers and labor unions, and other business groups oppose mandates for all of these reasons -- not because they have some ideological objection to any particular form of treatment.

They have a point.

Michigan should allow employers and employees to work out the insurance plans that best suit their needs, without the state heaping on costly mandates.

# Governors try to tackle mounting long-term care costs

Sunday, February 26, 2006

By Sarah Kellogg  
Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON -- As states look to balance their troubled budgets, the solution might come from taking another crack at controlling long-term care spending for the elderly in the Medicaid program.

Medicaid, long the bane of strapped state budgets, has become even more of a burden as a poor economy, exploding health care costs and a growing number of seniors push the program -- and states like Michigan-- to the limit.

When the nation's governors come to Washington today for the annual winter meeting of the National Governors' Association, reforming Medicaid long-term care will be high on the agenda. "Unfortunately, escalating Medicaid costs consume an increasing share of our budgets each year and threaten the long-term viability of the program," Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour, who will chair Monday's Medicaid discussion session, said in a written statement.

Medicaid consumes nearly 25 percent of Michigan's general fund spending every year. And while only about 28 percent of Medicaid recipients are elderly or disabled, they consume 67 percent of Medicaid spending.

These days, conversations about reforming Medicaid are likely to start with long-term care because most of the governors, including Granholm, have already attacked Medicaid costs associated with poor mothers and their children by limiting benefit packages or adding co-payments and deductibles.

Many members of Congress say the states need to act because they can't keep coming back to Washington for more and more federal funding. Medicaid is paid for jointly by the federal government and the states.

"I think we have to be responsible here and look at all of Medicaid's costs," said Michigan U.S. Rep. Candice Miller, R-Harrison Township. "There has to be a social safety net, but if there's no end in sight something is wrong here."

Beyond trimming overall Medicaid costs, Granholm has instituted her own long-term care reforms. She wants to create a one-stop-shopping system to evaluate whether ailing seniors on Medicaid can be served in their homes or must be cared for in a nursing home. Three pilot project sites are being sought right now and could be selected by the end of June.

Ensuring that seniors find the right setting for care can save millions of dollars, say experts. States that have tried this approach, such as Colorado, have about 50 percent of seniors in long-term care in nursing homes compared to Michigan which has 83 percent of its seniors in nursing homes.

It makes economic sense. Nursing home care can cost as much as \$4,500 a month, while in-home health care services can cost as much as \$1,250 a month, according to the state data.

"To get people placed appropriately is a very good idea," said Beverley McDonald, a spokeswoman with the Michigan Consumer Health Care Coalition. "But I've never been

completely convinced it's going to save that much money. If you're going to do it right, sometimes it's going to cost more."

Congress has jumped in with its own ideas on how best to rein in long-term care costs. A statute enacted earlier this month requires states to look back five years to see if seniors have transferred any assets to family members or a charity. If they have, they will be penalized. It also allows states to deny long-term care benefits to seniors with homes worth \$500,000 or more; states are allowed to kick that up to \$750,000.

Among the other proposals that states are considering or sought federal approval for are:

Allowing elderly beneficiaries to use reverse mortgages to convert the equity in their homes into cash to pay for in-home or nursing home care.

Requiring seniors to purchase long-term care insurance to qualify for certain levels of coverage under Medicaid after the insurance is exhausted.

Paying family members to assist in the care of their elderly parents or relatives.

Offering financial incentives, such as eliminating co-payments for services, for Medicaid beneficiaries who participate in wellness programs, such as smoking cessation programs.

And creating a health-care voucher program, which would give Medicaid beneficiaries a voucher to use to purchase health insurance. Right now, seniors are exempt from the pilot programs being implemented in Florida and South Carolina.

## **Granholm Continues Fight to Keep Michigan Citizens Warm this Winter**

*Granholm Proclaims "Keep Michigan Warm Week" Throughout State*

LANSING – In her weekly radio address, Governor Jennifer M. Granholm today highlighted the critical steps her administration is taking to keep Michigan citizens warm this winter.

"From gasoline for your car to natural gas and heating oil for your home, we all know that costs for energy have been steadily rising – and the higher they go this winter, the harder my administration is working to make sure all our citizens can afford to stay warm," Granholm said. "Our goal is to make sure that no Michigan household has to choose between heating and eating."

Granholm declared February 19 through February 25 "Keep Michigan Warm Week" to help raise awareness about organizations across the state working to keep citizens safe this winter. She also encouraged residents to support "Walk for Warmth" fundraisers being held by Community Action Agencies across the state Saturday, February 25.

Additionally, the Governor has taken the following steps to combat high heating bills in Michigan:

- Asked the Michigan Public Service Commission to make \$25 million in additional home heating assistance available for citizens struggling to pay their energy bills. This week, the commission announced funding will go organizations across the state, including The Heat and Warmth Fund, the Salvation Army, and programs through the Michigan Department of Human Services;
- Joined Michigan's major utility providers and the state's Community Action Agencies in announcing the "Save Energy with Ease" program. This program is currently assisting five thousand Michigan residents with free programmable thermostats, home energy conservation kits, and consumer education, and;
- Led a bipartisan group of 28 governors in asking Congressional leaders to increase funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program

"We know that it's cold right now, and we want our citizens to stay safe and warm this winter," Granholm said.

For more information on resources available to help with home heating bills, call the Michigan Public Service Commission at 1-800-292-9555 or visit [www.michigan.gov/bewinterwise](http://www.michigan.gov/bewinterwise)

The Governor's weekly radio address is released each Friday at 10:00 a.m. and may be heard on broadcast stations across that state through an affiliation with the Michigan Association of Broadcasters. The address will also be available on the Governor's Website on Mondays as a pod cast for general distribution to personal MP3 players and home computers.



*MIRS*

*February 24, 2006*

## **Gov. Wants To Keep People Warm**

In her weekly radio address, Gov. Jennifer GRANHOLM declared Feb. 19-25 "Keep Michigan Warm Week."

She designated the week as "Keep Warm Week" to raise awareness about organizations across the state that are trying to keep people warm.

"From gasoline for your car to natural gas and heating oil for your home, we all know that costs for energy have been steadily rising - and the higher they go this winter, the harder my administration is working to make sure all our citizens can afford to stay warm," Granholm said. "Our goal is to make sure that no Michigan household has to choose between heating and eating."

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"We know that it's cold right now, and we want our citizens to stay safe and warm this winter," Granholm said.

# Short-term, long-term solutions to hunger

Kaloamazoo Gazette

Friday, February 27, 2006

It is a sad commentary on the state of Michigan's economy that the demands on area food pantries by low-income residents keeps growing.

Last week, the Food Bank of South Central Michigan reported it had supplied more than 5 million pounds of food to 272 agencies in eight counties, feeding 92,000 people.

The report was part of the annual national "Hunger in America" report, which revealed that 43 percent of clients surveyed said they had to choose between buying food or paying for heat and electricity, 41 percent had to choose between paying rent or mortgage and food, and 28 percent had to choose between medical bills and food.

Bob Randles, executive director of the Food Bank of South Central Michigan, said: "It is tragic that so many people are relying on emergency food assistance in the United States, where we produce enough food to feed every hungry person in the world."

The issue with hunger in America, of course, isn't that there isn't enough food.

The problem is that too many people don't earn enough money to buy nutritious, wholesome food in adequate quantities. That's partly because high-paying, low-skill jobs are disappearing and aren't coming back.

And that's partly because too many people are either low-skilled or have skills for which there is little demand.

A similar report last week from America's Second Harvest, the nation's largest network of food banks and soup kitchens, reported that it assisted more than 25 million people last year -- up 9 percent from 2001.

The America's Second Harvest report revealed that 36 percent of those seeking food assistance came from households in which at least one person had a job.

The two reports remind us of the importance of supporting food banks and pantries that have seen requests for food increase, year after year. The need for food assistance is short-term and immediate.

But even more important are the long-term solutions. We must address the problem of why so many Americans are seeking food assistance in the first place. We must address the root causes of poverty -- inadequate education, few marketable skills, a shortage of good-paying jobs.

Until we do that, demands on food banks and soup kitchens will continue to rise, year after year.

Published February 26, 2006

## **Straw house inspiring shelters**

### **Activists see it as option for low-income, homeless**

By Hugh Leach  
Lansing State Journal

CORUNNA - A home being built of straw and mud may become a model for inexpensive shelters and housing for homeless and low-income people.

Representatives of a number of agencies including the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) and Habitat for Humanity on Friday looked over the unique structure under construction near Corunna.

The home of Keith and Patricia Wright is being built in an old dairy barn, but the technology can be applied to smaller homes constructed from the ground up, said Roland Mikan, owner of NextGen Hybrid Homes Inc. of Durand.

#### **Advertisement**

Mikan is building the home using straw bales and then covering it in mud.

He said a 1,200-square-foot home could be built for \$25,000 to \$50,000 and completed in 30 days to 60 days.

"These would be cheaper and quicker to put up than conventional homes, and there would be no maintenance required on the building for the rest of its life," Mikan said.

At Friday's informational meeting, about 30 people gathered to learn more about cost-saving comparisons and building materials.

Patricia Wright said most of the outside of what will become her family's home is now encased in straw bales. Preparations are under way to build a deck on the back and put the windows in the master bedroom.

When the weather warms up, cement for the floors and garage will be poured.

The Wright home, which she said they hope to occupy this fall, is considerably larger than the smaller homes Mikan envisions. It will have 9,600 square feet of living space, plus a 3,600-square-foot garage.

Mikan estimated the cost of the Wright home will be about \$11 a square foot.

Contact Hugh Leach at 377-1119 or [hleach@lsj.com](mailto:hleach@lsj.com).



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LANSING



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## News Release

Contact: Stepheni Schlinker or Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394

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### DHS recommends \$674,184 for low-income tax assistance and family services

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February 27, 2006

LANSING – More than 10,000 low-income Michigan residents could receive tax assistance and fatherhood, marriage and parenting services through 28 community organizations and nonprofit entities recommended for funding by Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS).

The DHS recommended 20 awards totaling \$674,184 to provide Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) assistance for low-income families and recommended 8 organizations receive awards for projects that combine EITC assistance with fatherhood, parenting, and healthy marriage initiatives.

"These funds will support services to low-income Michigan residents in a variety of areas," said Department of Human Services director Marianne Udow. "They will support community organizations that help individuals and families recoup federal tax credits and help them improve important social and family skills."

Grantees that will provide EITC services include:

Organization	City	Area Served	Amount
Heart of West Michigan United Way	Grand Rapids	Kent County	\$40,000
Alger-Marquette Community Action Board	Marquette	Alger and Marquette counties	\$10,000
Community Action Agency Jackson, Lenawee, Hillsdale	Jackson	Jackson, Hillsdale and Lenawee counties	\$20,500
Community Action Agency of South Central Michigan	Battle Creek	Barry, Branch, Calhoun & St. Joseph counties	\$20,500
Capital Area Community Services	Lansing	Clinton, Eaton, Ingham counties	\$26,000
Economic Opportunity Committee of St. Clair County	Port Huron	St. Clair Co.	\$12,500

(more)

<b>Organization</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Area Served</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Genesee County Community Access Resource Development	Flint	Genesee Co.	\$26,000
Gogebic-Ontonagon Community Action Agency	Ironwood		\$14,000
Human Development Commission	Caro	Thumb area including Huron, Sanilac, Lapeer & Tuscola counties	\$23,000
Kalamazoo County Health and Community Services	Kalamazoo	Kalamazoo County	\$20,500
Macomb County Community Service Agency	Clinton Township	Monroe County	\$26,000
Monroe County Opportunity Program	Monroe	Monroe County	\$14,000
Muskegon-Oceana Community Action Partnership	Muskegon	Muskegon and Oceana counties	\$12,000
Northeast Michigan Community Service Agency	Alpena	11 northeast lower peninsula counties	\$16,500
Northwest Michigan Human Services Agency	Traverse City	12 northwest lower peninsula counties	\$20,500
Ottawa County Community Action Agency	Holland	Ottawa County	\$15,500
Saginaw County Community Action Committee	Saginaw	Saginaw County	\$20,500
Washtenaw County Employment Training Community Services	Ypsilanti	Washtenaw County	\$5,420
Accounting Aid Society	Detroit	Wayne, Oakland, Macomb & Livingston counties	\$84,174
Wayne-Metropolitan Community Action Agency	Wyandotte	Wayne County excluding Detroit	\$21,000

Grants awarded for projects that combine EITC education and outreach with fatherhood, healthy marriage or parenting services includes:

<b>Organization</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Area Served</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Michigan State University	East Lansing	Wayne, Washtenaw, Oakland, Saginaw & Sanilac counties	\$68,000
Spaulding for Children	Southfield	Wayne County	\$20,000
Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency	Pontiac	Oakland County	\$16,000
Community Action Agency of South Central Michigan	Battle Creek	Calhoun and St. Joseph counties	\$20,000
BHK Child Development Board	Houghton	Baraga, Houghton and Keweenaw counties	\$18,590
Ottawa County Community Action Agency	Holland	Ottawa County	\$18,000
Kent Child and Family Resource Council	Grand Rapids	Kent County	\$45,000
Community Action Agency Jackson, Lenawee, Hillsdale	Jackson	Jackson County	\$20,000

For more information go to [www.michigan.gov/dhs](http://www.michigan.gov/dhs)



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### **Oakland County collaborative receives \$70,000 Great Start Collaborative grant**

*Early Childhood Investment Corporation grants focus on early childhood development and care*

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**February 27, 2006**

PONTIAC – Today the superintendent of the Oakland Schools joined board members of the Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) and local legislators to celebrate a \$70,000 grant to support a local Great Start Collaborative that will strengthen early childhood development and care in Oakland County.

Michigan Department of Human Services director Marianne Udow and ECIC chief operating officer Mike Foley presented a ceremonial check to Dr. Vickie Markavitch, Oakland Schools Superintendent.

From the day she took office, Governor Jennifer M. Granholm has maintained that early childhood development and care is a critical investment in the economic viability of the state.

"Children learn more from birth to age three than at any other time, setting the stage for future success in school and in life," Granholm said. "High-quality early childhood development and care is a wise investment in our children and our economy."

The Early Childhood Investment Corporation, which the Governor announced in her 2005 State of the State address, is developing the framework for effective early childhood development and care programs through partnerships with local collaboratives around the state. The local Great Start Collaboratives will use the grant money from the ECIC to conduct a community assessment and develop a strategic plan for the development of a comprehensive system of early childhood services and supports, accessible to all children from birth to kindergarten and their families.

"These grants will help bring together the public and private sectors, including government, business, civic, faith, education, and community groups to develop a long-standing, sustained focus on early learning and childhood development," said Mike Foley. "The board was able to award this first round of grants with the resources currently available, and is committed to funding Great Start Collaboratives throughout the state as new funding sources are identified."

Intermediate school districts will act as fiduciaries for the grants. In addition to Oakland Schools, 13 other ISDs and RESAs around the state were also awarded funding for planning and/or implementation of Great Start Collaboratives.

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"Children who participate in high-quality early childhood development programs are better prepared to enter elementary school, are more likely to pursue secondary education and have lower dropout rates and higher high school graduation rates," DHS Director Marianne Udow said. "By improving the skills of a large fraction of the workforce, these programs for poor children will reduce poverty and strengthen the state's ability to compete in the global market."

For more information about the ECIC and Great Start collaboratives, visit the Project Great Start Web site at [www.michigan.gov/greatstart](http://www.michigan.gov/greatstart)

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